

Public Advisory Committee Meeting Notes – November 12, 2014

In Attendance: Carl Gitscheff (BC Wildlife Federation, DC), Dave Harris (Cattlemen's Association, etc., FSJ), Mark Phinney (RPBio – Avian Specialist & RPF, Dawson Creek), Ingejean Mattson (Biologist and Naturalist, Dawson Creek), Leif Olsen (NE BC Guides Association, Toad River), Nick Baccante (FLNRO Fish and Wildlife Section Head, FSJ), Greg Van Dolah (FLNRO Manager of Resource Stewardship, FSJ), Jim Fulton (NE BC Wildlife Fund, Toad River); Chris Addison (FLNRO Director of Resource Management, FSJ); Raychl Lukie (FLNRO Engagement Specialist, FSJ), David Vince (MOE Sergeant of Conservation Officer Service, FSJ); Alicia Woods (FLNRO Wildlife Biologist, FSJ)

*Leif Olsen and Ingejean Mattson joined via teleconference; David Vince – joined in person at 11:20 am; Alicia Woods joined after lunch

Introductions

Action Item Review

Action Item 1 – **COMPLETE** -Nick followed up w/ David Vince as to whether closed harvest for species of conservation concern would apply to First Nations

- COS confirmed would also apply to First Nations, but may not be worth pursuing enforcement
- e.g. Moberly Lake Trout -more of a mutual agreement struck with FNs to not harvest
- some First Nations still harvest on occasion

Action Item 2 – **COMPLETE** -Raychl drafted note to current PAC membership to inform the group that an invite would be sent for T8 to participate in the PAC

Action Item 3 – **COMPLETE** -PAC to begin brainstorming ideas about TOR

- brief discussion about items for inclusion in TOR; next steps covered under Action Item 5

Action Item 4 – **COMPLETE** -T8 invited to participate in formulating TOR

- invitations and follow up letters sent to T8 Wildlife Stewardship Board (WSB) Representatives on June 16, 2014 (letter shared at T8-BC WSB meeting), October 9, 2014 (letter emailed to T8 WSB Representatives) and October 23, 2014 (reminder email to T8 WSB Representatives about recent invite and opportunity to participate in Doodle Poll for selecting upcoming meeting date)
- response from T8 requested by October 31, 2014; no response received to date

Action Item 5 – **ONGOING** -subset of PAC members to begin formulating TOR after invite to participate in PAC sent to T8

- Raychl mentioned would raise opportunity again w/ T8 at upcoming meeting
- current PAC members disappointed that T8 has not yet expressed interest in participating
- brief discussion on subset of PAC that volunteered last PAC meeting (i.e. Leif Olsen, Carl Gitscheff and Murray Clark) to commence further discussion on developing TOR in the near term

Action Item 6 – **ONGOING** -PAC to address moose as discussion topic for upcoming PAC and identify objectives for group

- discussion ensued about health of moose populations and management planning

Action 7 – **COMPLETE** –Nick to invite COS to participate in the PAC

- CO David Vince attended meeting on November 12, 2014

General Updates

- vacant positions discussed (i.e. Lori Jeffrey and Julie Kline)
- brief overview of state of T8-BC WSB

Additional Topics Suggested for Inclusion on Agenda

- mule deer seasons and numbers
- sharp-tailed grouse and need for monitoring
 - interested in some measure of protection for leks
 - oil and gas development and predation contributing to decline
 - ravens thought to have a huge impact on survival of grouse chicks
 - sharp-tailed grouse more susceptible to predation than ruffed / franklin b/c raise clutches in more vulnerable locations (i.e. less security cover)
 - noticed dramatic increase in sharp-tailed grouse numbers observed in east Pouce block after extensive tapping in this area

Goat Inventory Summer 2014

- inventory commenced in northern area of South Peace in 2013
 - hope to continue with the north and continue to work upwards
- interested in continuing with inventory provided additional funding can be secured
- results of goat survey may lead to LEH adjustment and opening of areas currently closed to hunting in the future
 - suggestion made to still keep some areas closed to hunting
- other discussion ensued about goats regarding stability, learnedness and other impacts to goat populations
 - goat herd in Quintette area doing quite well despite destruction of larger part of their habitat owing to high level of mining activity
 - goats learned to leave area after learning warning sounds that indicated imminent blasting during widening of highway in Okanagan area
 - questioned raised whether research conducted on aerial impacts to goats (e.g. raptors)
 - questioned ability to quantify impact of raptors on lambs
 - few bald eagles in area thought to have a significant impact
 - repeat attacks by raptors weaken goat so more susceptible
 - reference made to raptor study in Banff
 - difficult to determine cause of death for deceased goats located at base of cliffs (i.e. could be incidental fall, predator-attributed, combination of factors, etc.)

Grizzly Bears

- significant number of incidental gbear sightings while conducting 2014 goat inventory
 - gbear population on the eastern slopes much higher than research suggests
 - goats and marmots both potential gbear prey items in higher alpine areas
 - more gbears than ungulates sighted in areas utilized by ungulates
- general agreement that there are a significant number of gbears in the Peace Region
 - current model may underestimate gbear population b/c based on predictor variables of little importance in the Peace (e.g. salmon, precipitation)
- couple of options for moving forward to secure a better population estimate for gbears
- Province looking to see if can continue with isotope analysis (i.e. blood, hair and bone)
 - blood – indicates food consumption in last few days
 - hair – index of food consumption in last few months
 - bone – provides insight for entire life cycle

-ideas proposed by PAC members to gain further insight into gbear numbers and key factors related to health of gbear population

- research gbear diet to determine composition of prey

 - suggest use of Northern Lights College facilities

- collect gbear hair samples from numerous marten boxes on traplines

 - used by gbears as scratching posts and so hair samples easily obtainable

 - would need to be able to quantify effort in a meaningful way

- wrap known rub trees in barbed wire

 - suggestion made that it would be easy to obtain samples in certain G/O areas

-need to have solid methodology that is easily defensible for whatever method is used to improve estimates and understanding of gbear population in Peace Region

-controversial articles discussed regarding gbears and their management (e.g. MacLean's and SFU)

Peace Northern Caribou Plan/ Penning Project

-progress being made in regards to implementation of plan

-WMFN, SFN and Scott MacNay looking to revisit penning project this year

-results of last year's penning project: 1 calf died in pen, 4 more calves and 1 cow died after release

- 4 calves and 1 cow killed by wolves

- calves were about 4 weeks of age upon release

- release was not ideal: could have been softer release to minimize stress to animals

 - should have coerced caribou out of pen with lichen instead of directing out of opening

 - cow that died ended up in PMT – stress induced?

- mortality rate of 25% from study may offer further support for dire state of caribou

-some changes anticipated for this year's penning project

- 15 caribou cows planned for capture this winter

 - may continue to increase number of caribou captured if program proves successful

- discussion about optimum time to release caribou from pens based on age / weight (e.g. when moose calves reach 400 lbs predation decreases dramatically)

-discussed unique caribou mortalities where head of animal missing

- 3 identified with similar results in Mayfield Lake area

- questioned possibility of raptors being source of mortality (e.g. Great-Horned Owl)

- may suggest other significant impacts to caribou that are unknown and do not coincide with winter predation and other suggested key influential factors

Aerial Wolf Removal

-may offer reprieve to caribou

-Cabinet had conversation last Monday regarding slight change in approach

- Wolf Management Plan gave authority to do this and could make simple amendment to support this approach

-in process of developing media management plan with hope to finalize mid-next week

- plan to send out news release while helicopter in progress

- hope to have T8 involved to fullest extent possible and highlight support from First Nations

 - show collaboration with First Nation partners

 - Province hopes to have joint letter of support from T8 First Nations

- opportunities for First Nation involvement on ground in terms of carcass retrieval and also participation in helicopter
- “Judas wolf removal” program with plans to remove 120-160 wolves in Quintette and Moberly Lake-
 - collar wolves that will join other packs to facilitate locating wolves to be dispatched
- east slopes of Quintette could be challenging to access
- may commence mid-December, weather dependent
 - suggestion to delay a month to increase success of program (i.e. wolves will be less mobile)
- staying out of parks b/c complexity with permitting, etc.
- 223 semi-automatic assault rifle w/ 30-round clip to be used in aerial wolf removal

- Wolf Reduction to Enhance the Recovery of Threatened Woodland Caribou Herds in the South Peace*
 - concern raised that Action Plan on pg 2 emphasizes wolf reduction with little mention of habitat protection, enhancement or other aspects of long-term plan
 - suggested need to highlight plan is comprehensive and not just about wolf removal
 - reference actions related to these other components
 - not really one plan in the works for habitat securement – a lot of pieces to it
 - Peace River Coal, Teck Coal and Director of Resource Management discussed securing 1800 ha in exchange for removing 450 ha of UWR
 - Teck Coal purchased land – section 17’s – leases lie outside of HEWR
 - adaptive management for linear corridors – research underway
 - secured 5000 ha, another 1000 ha for Coal Act and Land Act reserves
 - proactive securement of habitat via habitat offsetting from companies for future use
 - potential to use some as credit in future (e.g. mineral tenures for Teck Coal)

- Director of Resource Management requested support from different stakeholder groups for Aerial Wolf Removal Program and would like to ensure it is technically sound
- question raised about opportunity for wolf removal program in north in boreal caribou habitat
 - need to build on successes of program in the south peace wolf removal first

Former Wolf Removal Program in Peace Region

- conducted in agricultural areas
 - 3.5-4 yr program at cost of 300k
 - approximately 390 wolves killed
 - 700 lb calf killed and couple of cows came back dry; COS killed 1 wolf, Predator Control Specialist / former CO took 2
 - tough to get wolves when limited assistance from COS b/c they are busy tending to other issues
 - Dave Harris w/ Cattlemen’s Association assisted in checking traps

Little Smokey Wolf Removal Program

- used extensive trapping, poison and aerial control
- killed about 100 wolves / yr –more than doubled moose population at same time
- little uproar from public – good public relations

Wildlife Regulations, Management and Treaty Rights

- COS expects T8 to comply with regulations and management
 - no lever to enforce regulations on First Nations
 - authority under criminal code for shooting at night, shooting from road

- need to be part of T8 to hunt in T8 territory
 - do not accept permission given by T8 members to other FNs to harvest in T8 territory
- does 400 m hunting restriction on roadway allowances applies to First Nations?
 - regulation is enforced for safety reasons and would apply to all
- current investigations north of Dease Lake concerning buffalo north of town (i.e. concerned about sheltering)
- possibility of about 60 buffalo in Milligan Lake area
- domestic herd in Tumbler area – approximately 100 buffalo escaped and are at large (as many as 10 -15 seen in fescue field)
 - will take direction from Director of Resource Management and Department of Agriculture to resolve
- Kaska and T8 both claim rights to Toad River
 - ongoing issue of Kaska First Nations coming in and hunting in northern BC
 - if coming from Teslin would have to prove part of Kaska First Nation
- issue of hunters trespassing – news story of Ground Birch area incident in local paper
 - hunters leaving gut piles on property
- problems in upper and lower Cache, Hudson Hope, etc.
 - concern expressed that not enough is being done to address issue of trespassing

COS

- Jan 1, 2015 – Fort Nelson – 2 CO positions will be filled
 - boots on ground in March of 2015
- formerly 7 CO's in the Beaton Building
 - currently 3 CO's and David Vince in Beaton – capacity issue
 - getting some support from PG
- COS suggests getting message out for residents to relay issues and concerns to COS

Compliance & Enforcement

- Province applied for funding for a drone to fly set routes and conduct compliance checks
- soft game checks conducted previously at Skook's Landing
- COS mentioned idea of setting up a checkpoint to coincide with elk hunt in Toad River area
- COS has goal of at least 3 jet boat patrols annually in M-KMA
- compliance rate in Peace Region appears to be significantly low (i.e. about 1%)
 - utilize resources from DC and Chetwynd
 - go from DC to Yukon
- NRS at capacity

Wolf Research

- Provincial Vet was collecting wolf carcasses to determine prevalence rate of tapeworm

Proposed Gbear Research in Peace Region

- previous inventory for goats conducted in MU 7-50
- FSJ Wildlife Biologist suggested opportunity to conduct inventory / collar gbears by piggybacking with future goat inventories

- communication w/ Provincial gbear specialist about use of gbear data / feasible research projects
- could utilize two helicopters
 - helicopter dedicated to goat inventory could relay any incidental gbear sightings to secondary helicopter on standby to facilitate collaring of gbears

Moose

- licensed hunter that spends 25 days hunting has good chance of harvesting a legal moose
- suggested that rural areas present better opportunity for successfully harvesting a legal moose
 - lots of forage available where moose used to winter
- lack of burning in south peace may be contributing factor to poor moose populations
 - silviculture practices for coniferous forests not favorable for moose and many other species
- dramatic decrease in moose and elk noticed by cattlemen

Moose Management Planning

- partially driven by SFN agreement / term sheet
- SFN requested area closures in MU 7-31 and 7-32
 - Province has recommended more thoughtful / proactive comprehensive management
- may be slight differences in management strategy for different MUs but same principles need to apply
 - key is to define objectives and ensure alignment between FNs and stakeholders
- licensed harvest thought to have minimal impact, more likely influenced by road kills, disease, habitat availability and possibly other factors
 - habitat and disease need to be addressed over larger scale to be informative
- discussion about whether current hunting regime creates demographic effects
 - F&W Section Head mentioned collaborating with Victoria folks regarding need to look at Population Management Units
 - important to include stakeholders and First Nations
- burning and predator management may help increase moose population
 - harvest data suggests approximately 70,000 moose in the Province killed annually
- diversionary burning could be used as a tool to divert ungulates away from Ag areas
 - some PAC members commented burning program not aggressive enough
 - burning program should be more comprehensive and have a better set of objectives

M-KMA

- changes proposed for implementation
 - decrease trail width from 400 m to 10 m
 - increase weight restrictions on ATV's to 650 kg
 - changes likely implemented this time next year
- high level of access and activity on river corridors
 - concerned about boat traffic in area
- cannot cut access entirely, but could implement further limitations

Cumulative Effects Project

- pilot project in NE – Dawson Creek south as the spatial area
 - assessed 3 values: riparian intactness, old forests and road densities
- not particularly robust
- assess CE from PG to the north
- court of appeals decision partial driver for implementation (i.e. WMFN vs First Coal)

- want to be able to assess 11 values by 2020
 - team in Victoria looking at developing values
- want to be able to assess current impact today
- different approaches to this taken over time
- LRMP – along these lines
- first time CE intended to come to decision making side
 - questioned raised about lack of baseline data
 - difficult to determine starting point and relevance to current state of environment
 - defining objectives may be better approach
 - could misinform
- look at how meeting objectives based on set of values
 - concern raised that don't seem to have universally applied set of objectives
 - rules not applied equally

Sharp-Tailed Grouse

- concern over lack of protection of leks
 - Farmington area of particular concern
 - leks in Lower Cache area
 - lek associated with Site C to be obliterated – highway to run right through
 - pipeline w/ oil spill in same area as lek
 - concern that not identified / considered by OGC in O&G developments
- FSJ Wildlife Biologists have researched same 15 leks over last 10 yrs
 - 1 lek lost in first year
 - need one more year's data to begin analyzing data collected thus far
- conservation of several leks by speaking with landowners
 - several leks on private property not known and unable to advise landowners accordingly
- changes in crop use could be negatively impacting sharp-tailed grouse populations
- 50 m buffer currently applied leks
 - suggestion was made to have a 1 km buffer
- question raised about applying for SCEK funding to further grouse research

Action Item 1 – Greg Van Dolah to follow up w/ Shaun Currie re: use of lek data, etc. by OGC.

Action Item 2 – Alicia Woods to send Burn Plan to PAC.

Action Item 3 – Alicia Woods to speak further w/ Wildlife Management Branch re: Burn Plan.

Action Item 4 – FLNRO to prepare skeleton TOR for feedback from subset of group before distributing to rest of PAC.